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ABSTRACT

The concepts and practices of local school evaluation, as implemented in the Cincinnati Public Schools, are described. The conceptual framework of local school evaluation, which is based upon the needs of local schools, and attempts to incorporate evaluation with instructional activities, is presented. The components of the framework are: (1) needs assessment, (2) diagnosis of entry behavior, (3) assessment of implementation, and (4) assessment of end results. Also described is an operational network which insures cooperative efforts by evaluators and instructional staff. Illustrations and practical suggestions are provided for potential users of this concept. (Author)

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LOCALIZING EVALUATION FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS: CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

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LOCALIZING EVALUATION FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS: CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

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I. Purpose

This paper will describe one of the evaluation roles implemented in the Department of Research and Development in the Cincinnati Public Schools: local school evaluation. The role of local school evaluation is based upon the premise that evaluation is, in its concept and practice, an important part of the schooling process. It provides a framework for the evaluation process which is designed to meet the needs of local schools in a large public school system.

The major purpose of the paper is to introduce the concept of local school evaluation and to describe the steps followed for operationalizing the concept. Each step will be elaborated with tasks involved and knowledge gained through the implementation.

II. Background

There have been numerous efforts during the past decades to develop useful evaluation concepts and methods in order to make evaluation viable to the educational process (Merwin, 1969; Worthen and Sanders, 1973). In applying any evaluation concept at local schools, consideration must be made in at least three aspects: the unit of inquiry, the relationship to the accountability movement, and the local autonomy for program development.

First, the unit of inquiry, if evaluation can be viewed as a type of inquiry, is the school building. This position is based on the basic nature of schooling. Schooling is an integrated, teaching-learning activity which

is largely influenced by the commitment of the people directly engaged in the educational process within a school building. Although educational decisions are often made by the central office on a system-wide basis, there are variances as to how these decisions are carried out from school to school. Evaluation, if it attempts to affect the school program, must be largely a school-based function.

Second, public demand for "accountability" of educational systems and the movement toward accountability have forced school administrators and teachers to better comprehend evaluative information. The majority of school staff members, however, are not trained in evaluation, and there is a need for school administrators and teachers to acquaint themselves with evaluation concepts. It is necessary that evaluation services are available from the central office, if not housed in each building, so that the need can be met.

The final consideration in applying evaluation to individual schools is the amount of local autonomy for program development in order to meet unique expectations of the people at the local level. Just as individual children differ, so do individual schools. If the school system does allow this local autonomy and operates under a decentralized structure, the concept of evaluation should be tailored to the unique needs and stages of program development of the local school.

Having the above considerations in mind, an applicable model of evaluation was sought. Hammond's model (1967), Discrepancy Evaluation Model (Provus, 1971), and the CIPP Evaluation Model (Stufflebeam, et.al., 1971) were among the most applicable to local school situations. The CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) Evaluation Model was adopted for a

framework of local school evaluation. The basic rationale for this selection, besides the above considerations, was that the CIPP allows provisions for a complementary relationship between program development and evaluation. The initial conception of a model within the CIPP framework is well described in an article written by Jacobs (1974), "A Model for Program Development and Evaluation." He emphasizes the importance of local schools' initiative for more educational programming as well as the interrelatedness of program development and evaluation.

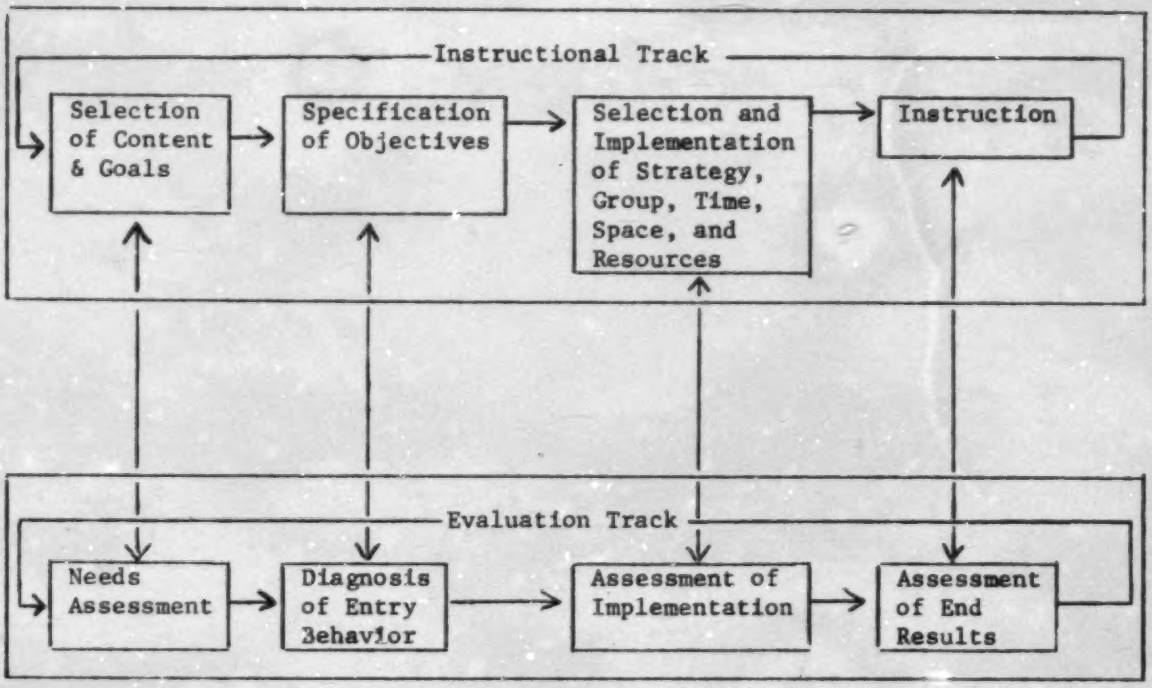
Evaluation in this paper is also defined as "the process of delineating, obtaining, and providing relevant information to decision makers to service the decision needs inherent in program development." (Jacobs, 1974, p.16)

III. Concept

Local school evaluation (LSE) can be viewed as a series of activities which are services to the instructional staff of a school. There are two parallel tracks operating within the proposed local school evaluation model: an instructional track and an evaluation track. The instructional track falls within the domain of each school as the staff and instructional consultants plan and work effectively to teach each child. The proposed evaluation track serves as support for the instructional track. Figure 1 represents the model for local school evaluation.

As indicated in the schema, there are four components in each track, and each component in the instructional track interacts with the parallel component in the evaluation track. In practice, the distinction between the evaluation activity and instruction may not be clear since the LSE staff and the instructional staff will work together toward a common goal.

Figure 1. Model For Local School Evaluation.



The four components of the evaluation track include: (1) needs assessment, (2) diagnosis of entry behavior, (3) assessment of implementation, and (4) assessment of end results. Each component will be described below.

Needs Assessment. Assessing needs in a school is the first step toward instructional planning. Needs can be defined as a discrepancy between what is desired and what is. In order to identify needs, several techniques can be used. Examination of data stored in the School Information System (SIS) would be one way. The School Information System contains attendance data, mobility rates, data on the staff, test scores, survey results, and others. Another way would be gathering information about the perceived needs by the school staff, parents, or students. The LSE staff can assist the school staff to identify existing data sources, interpret data, and develop new instruments for the school.

The information gathered at this stage is to select specific problem areas and to focus on goals. In other words, goal setting is a product of needs assessment activity. It should be remembered that needs assessment is an on-going process, in its best form, attempting to adjust and readjust to any changes that might occur in or outside a school.

Diagnosis of Entry Behavior. Once the goals and the content have been specified, they must be translated into specific objectives. Objectives must be written in measurable terms in order to facilitate the evaluation phase as well as the actual instruction. Objectives must contain four key aspects. They describe something which the learner does or produces. They state a behavior or a product of the learner's behavior. They state the timeline and the conditions under which the behavior is to occur. In other words, objectives must answer four questions: who, what, when, and how well.

In any instructional program the content selected and the objectives written must be sensitive to the entering behavior of the learner. If the content is too difficult or too easy for the learner, effective instruction does not and cannot occur.

Diagnosis of entry behavior can provide valuable input to establishing the baseline or beginning point. Evaluation then becomes meaningful in terms of growth. During this stage, the LSE staff can present data to establish entering behavior, help the school staff formulate measurable objectives, and assist in obtaining other diagnostic tools.

Assessment of Implementation. The third step in the LSE Model is to assess the implementation of instructional or program design. This is the phase when instructional means are designed by the instructional staff to

achieve stated objectives. Major elements of the design include: (1) determination of strategy, (2) organization of groups, (3) allocation of time, (4) allocation of space, and (5) selection of resources. These key elements separately and together affect the accomplishment of the objectives. Assistance from an instructional consultant is invaluable in this area. Operationally, a team effort of an instructional consultant and a LSE staff member can be used to assist the school staff.

The evaluation function at this stage includes collecting and providing two types of data. First, we need to collect data describing a system (a class, a program, or a school) in terms of teaching and learning strategy, group, time, space, and resources used. The second type of data are those comparing the above description with the plan or design in the same five elements. With the two types of data we can say: "This is what we saw in your classroom," and "Is this what you intended?" These descriptive data may be helpful to classroom teachers, but the real usefulness comes from analyzing the data in terms of achievement of objectives. The next component deals with this aspect.

Assessment of End Results. The fourth and final stage of the model ties the entire procedure together. In the instructional phase a "re-teach" or "go on" decision is made. In the evaluation phase an assessment of the end results is made in order to improve the effectiveness of the overall program and make any necessary corrections.

Although this stage is last, it is based on every other step in this systematic model. Evaluation information collected at this time indicates the extent to which the measurable criteria included in the objectives were obtained.

By using this system, it is the hope of the LSE staff not only to provide the school staff with an assessment of end results, but also to provide data about needs of students and the school, possible diagnostic information, as well as implementation information. Through looking at the component parts of the evaluation and instructional system, it then becomes possible to see exactly where these systems are working and where they are not functioning properly. This cooperative effort can provide information that is supportive and responsive to the needs of local schools.

In fact, all of the four components are neither necessary for every school nor used in the same sequence by all schools. Depending on the pressing needs perceived by the local staff, any component of the model is more emphasized than others; and furthermore, there are interrelationships among components.

IV. Practice

Local school evaluation (LSE) as a concept holds many exciting possibilities for professional evaluators and school staffs as well. As always, there are many difficulties in turning this concept into practice. This section of the paper will deal with how the concept of local school evaluation was implemented in the Cincinnati Public Schools.

There have been usually two to four evaluators assigned to the task of local school evaluation each year. They are physically located in the central office with the Program Evaluation Branch of the Department of Research and Development while they work closely with the principal and the staff of local schools. The primary target group to which LSE services are rendered includes about 30 Title I, ESEA elementary schools and other schools for which evaluation funds are available. Although the role of

local school evaluator have been implemented in the Cincinnati Public Schools for a couple of years, a more systematic approach was taken during the 1974-75 school year. The steps planned for systematic implementation of LSE are as follows:

1. Develop a common conceptual framework for evaluation which is suitable for operation at the local school level.
2. Develop specific LSE activities that could help school personnel in evaluation.
3. Develop strategies for effective entry to each school.
4. Develop and organize materials to be used for LSE services.
5. Provide LSE services.
6. Maintain a credible relationship with the local school.

Each of the steps will be discussed next. The conceptual framework of evaluation is presented in the earlier section of this paper and will not be discussed again. One comment may be noteworthy in terms of implementation. It took many long hours, rewriting, and discussing to produce a document upon which members of the LSE team could agree. This, however, helped the LSE members establish a common basis for evaluation practice. It can be said that the theory must come before the practice.

The next step was to use the collective evaluation experiences of the local school evaluators and compile a list of LSE activities. This step was performed to see how specific activities fit into the LSE framework. It also forced the LSE staff to examine the conceptual framework to see if it was indeed practical and workable. The following was developed as examples of LSE activities. Activities were listed for the purpose of organization under each of the four components of the model: (1) needs assessment, (2) diagnosis, (3) assessment of implementation, and (4) assessment of end results.

Examples of Local School Evaluation Activities

Needs Assessment

Survey staff, students, parents perceptions of need.
Survey attitudes of staff, students, parents.
Review and analyze attendance, mobility, and socio-economic data.
Explain standardized test procedures, purposes, and results.
Assist staff in the development of goals.

Diagnosis

Provide information and consultations on the use of test results.
Review types and purposes of available diagnostic tools for teacher use.
Selection of criteria or reliable instruments to determine present status.
Assist staff in the development of measurable objectives.
Create instruments for local objectives.

Assessment of Implementation

Analysis of classroom organization.
Provide sources of information with regard to instructional strategies.
Observe classroom interaction (upon request).

Assessment of End Results

Compare student achievement by length of stay in school.
Longitudinal analysis of school data.
Compare standardized test scores for groups within a school.
Compare standardized test scores to similar schools within the system.
Assessment of performance on locally designed instruments.

With the general framework developed and examples of the activities in hand, the LSE staff began the third step of the plan. The task was to develop every effective means of introducing the LSE concept and the LSE staff to schools. This phase of the implementation was considered important because the LSE staff did not want the school staff to have misunderstandings about LSE or to be suspicious of evaluators from the central office. The LSE team needed to let the school staff know that evaluation could be used as a problem-solving tool and could be uniquely suited to the needs of an individual school.

Various communication means were utilized, including a formal letter from the Department of Research and Development and follow-up phone calls. The general framework and a list of LSE activities were also widely distributed. Since the primary target group served during 1974-75 were the Title I, ESEA schools, it was necessary to include other professional personnel who served the same schools. The instructional consultants assigned to those schools and the Title I central staff were kept informed about the LSE operation and activities of each school. It was also believed that the participation of other professionals with diverse expertise would increase the likelihood of successful operation with the school.

A formal letter and other communications were helpful only to let the school staff be aware of the services. The awareness, however, did not necessarily guarantee the use of the services. Similarly, the LSE staff found that the awareness of LSE did not lead the school staff to request a LSE service. Each principal involved received a formal letter, a copy of the LSE document, and a checklist form to request LSE services. Response to the LSE checklist was very poor. After the main reasons for these poor results were discovered, the strategy was changed. The LSE team members made appointments to see each principal. At these meetings, the LSE staff explained what was in the material and found most of the principals cooperative and anxious to receive one or more LSE services.

Before this initial contact, the LSE staff attempted to become familiar with the school data, such as enrollment, number of staff, ethnic composition, socio-economic level of the community, and average scores on the standardized tests. Such information would help the LSE staff understand the concerns the school might have. Also important was the

locus of the initiative. The likelihood of follow-through on the part of a school appeared to be increased if the activities were initiated with enthusiasm by the principal or the school staff.

The fourth step was to develop and organize necessary materials. The LSE team members began to prepare standard formats for various activities. Work sheets were designed for teachers' use. Files were established for each activity and for each school. The activity file contained work sheets for analyzing data, sample instruments, data from the School Information System, and others. School files kept data on each school and records of all services provided by the evaluator. The purpose was to have more efficient operation and to fill the particulars of that individual school in the general format. The activity file was updated and forms were revised as the LSE staff worked with schools and discovered any aspects that needed improvement.

Phase five of the LSE implementation was the delivery of services. Once the school staff understood what the LSE team could provide and began to work with one or more LSE members, there were various tasks to be done such as designing instruments, analyzing data, and providing information in a useful form. It became obvious that teamwork, among LSE members as well as with instructional consultants, was effective at this stage. Working with the instructional staff, whose specialty was much different from that of the LSE, allowed the services to be more diverse in meeting the expectations of the school staff.

Most of the schools that requested a service were interested in the first two components of the model: needs assessment and diagnosis activities. Very few schools requested a service on the third component,

assessment of implementation. Some schools requested longitudinal data analysis, but used it as a basis for needs assessment. This was an indication that the activities listed under each component could be viewed differently depending on the purpose of the use of data. Various requests for services provided the team member an opportunity to further examine the model.

At one time the LSE staff questioned whether the information provided was useful and whether it made a change in the school. Usually principals were anxious to benefit from any additional service they could get, but very often one service would simply satisfy them without a long-range plan to improve the current school situation. A strong commitment of the principal and the staff to improve the current situation was most crucial in the use of information. The timeliness of information provided was another factor. If the information was related to one of the top-priority items of the school at a given time, it was readily accepted and more likely used. Also important was the leadership pattern in each building. The building principal's understanding and leadership can make changes in the school.

The final task was maintaining a credible relationship with the school staff. It is essential for an evaluator to establish a trust relationship with the client at the personal level as well as at the professional level. The local school evaluator, by his/her centrally located position, can maximize objectivity and independence. However, he/she can be lacking in the knowledge of each school's problems and concerns at a given time. The evaluator's sensitivity toward the field situation and flexibility in operation can greatly help in maximizing credibility and usefulness.

The process of maintaining a credible relationship with school personnel has been developmental in the sense that a service provided at one stage caused another activity. When the process becomes developmental, it is more likely that the information provided has been used. It also indicates that a positive relationship of the local school evaluator and school staff was maintained.

Thus far, the six steps used for implementing the local school evaluation concept have been discussed. A system of local school evaluation can be replicated in any school system. The steps outlined here worked in Cincinnati and are suggested but need not be followed exactly. However, in the Cincinnati Public School System the use and importance of local school evaluation has been demonstrated.

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ABSTRACT

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The concept and practice of local school evaluation, as implemented in the Cincinnati Public Schools, is introduced and described. The paper presents the conceptual framework of local school evaluation, which is based upon the needs of local schools and attempts to incorporate evaluation into instructional activities. The components of the framework are: (1) needs assessment, (2) diagnosis of entry behavior, (3) assessment of implementation, and (4) assessment of end results.

The second section of the paper deals with the steps followed for operationalizing the concept. Each step is elaborated with tasks involved and knowledge gained through the implementation. It is concluded that the model of local school evlaution seems to be a functional concept and could probably be replicated in other school systems.